

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A connector assembly for use with a tarp, said connector assembly comprising:

male and female connector members, each said connector member comprising:

a base portion having [[a]] broad, generally flat bearing face for engaging material of a tarp;

at least one of said connector members further comprising:

a handle portion extending from said base portion opposite said bearing face for being gripped and rotated by the fingers of a hand and having an opening for attachment of a load thereto;

said male connector member further comprising:

a threaded screw portion extending normal to said bearing face thereof, said screw portion having a tapered, sharply pointed tip for piercing material of a tarp; and

said female connector member further comprising:

a threaded socket portion extending normal to said bearing face thereof for receiving said screw portion of said male connector member in threaded engagement therewith.

Claim 2 (original): The connector assembly of claim 1, wherein each of said bearing faces comprises:

a plurality of raised protuberances for frictionally engaging material of a tarp so as to prevent accidental loosening of said connector members.

Claim 3 (original): The connector assembly of claim 2, wherein said raised protuberances have substantially rounded contours so as to avoid damaging material of a tarp that is engaged thereby.

Claim 4 (original): The connector assembly of claim 3, wherein said raised protuberances comprise:

a plurality of elongate, substantially oval protuberances arranged radially about said screw and socket portions.

Claim 5 (original): The connector assembly of claim 2, wherein said base portions of said male and female connector members each further comprise:

a raised, substantially flat-surfaced clamping ring formed annularly around said screw and socket portions, respectively, for clamping said tarp about an opening formed by said screw portions so as to prevent tears from propagating therefrom.

Claim 6 (original): The connector assembly of claim 5, wherein said raised protuberances are formed around outer perimeters of said clamping rings on said male and female connector members.

Claim 7 (original): The connector assembly of claim 2, wherein each said bearing face is substantially circular so as to evenly distribute loads into material of a tarp that is engaged thereby.

Claim 8 (original): The connector assembly of claim 7, wherein each said base portion further comprises:

a radiused rim extending about a perimeter of said circular bearing face for progressively engaging material of a tarp so as to avoid damage thereto.

Claim 9 (original): The connector assembly of claim 8, wherein each said radiused rim comprises:

a rounded lip having smoothly contoured radius that extends away from a plane of said flat bearing face through an arc of about 90° or greater.

Claim 10 (original): The connector assembly of claim 7, wherein each said handle portion comprises:

a flange portion extending generally normal to said base portion for being gripped between a thumb and forefinger.

Claim 11 (currently amended): The connector assembly of claim 10, wherein each ~~[[of]]~~ said flange portion comprises:

a generally semicircular flange having first and second sides that flare concavely towards said base portion of said connector member.

Claim 12 (currently amended): The connector assembly of claim 11, wherein said ~~at least one~~ opening for attachment of a load comprises:

a bore formed in ~~at least one~~ of said flange ~~portions~~ portion.

Claim 13 (currently amended): The connector assembly of claim ~~[[9]]~~10, wherein said ~~at least one~~ opening for attachment of a load comprises:

a hook portion mounted on ~~at least one~~ of said flange portions.

Claim 14 (original): A connector assembly for use with a tarp, said connector assembly comprising:

male and female connector members, each said connector member being unitarily molded and comprising:

a base portion comprising:

a broad, generally flat, substantially circular bearing face for engaging material of a tarp;

a plurality of raised, generally oval protuberances formed on said bearing surface for frictionally engaging material of a tarp so as to prevent accidental loosening of said connector members, said protuberances being arranged radially proximate a perimeter of said circular bearing face so that the long axes thereof are disposed generally perpendicular to a

direction of rotation of said bearing face, said protuberances further having substantially rounded contours so as to avoid damaging material of a tarp that is engaged thereby; and

a smoothly radiused lip extending around a perimeter of said circular bearing face for progressively engaging material of a tarp so as to avoid damage thereto, said radiused lip extending away from a plane of said bearing surface through an arc of about 90° or greater;

at least one of said connector members further comprising:

a handle portion extending from said base portion opposite said bearing face, said handle portion comprising:

a flange portion extending generally normal to said base portion and having first and second concavely flared sides for being gripped between a thumb and forefinger, said sides spreading apart toward said base portion so as to form a thickened area of said flange portion where said flange portion is joined to said base portion; and

an opening for attachment of a load to said flange portion;

said male connector member further comprising:

a threaded screw portion extending normal to said bearing face thereof, said screw portion having a tapered, sharply pointed tip for piercing material of a tarp; and

said female connector member further comprising:

a threaded socket portion extending normal to said bearing face thereof for receiving said screw portion of said male connector member in threaded engagement therewith.

Claim 15 (original): The connector assembly of claim 14, wherein said radiused lip extends away from said plane of said bearing surface through an arc of about 180° or greater.

Claim 16 (original): The connector assembly of claim 14, wherein said screw portion of said male connector member comprises:

a tapered thread for gradually spreading material of a tarp so as to minimize damage to said material as said material is penetrated by said screw portion.

Claim 17 (original): The connector assembly of claim 14, wherein said screw portion of said male connector member is a two-stage screw comprising:

a tapered thread portion proximate said pointed tip; and

a straight-sided thread portion proximate said base portion of said male connector member, said socket portion of said female connector member having a cooperating straight-sided thread portion formed therein.

Claim 18 (original): The connector assembly of claim 14, wherein said base portions of said male and female connector members each further comprise:

a raised, substantially flat-surfaced clamping ring formed annularly around said screw and socket portions, respectively, for clamping said tarp about an opening formed by said screw portions so as to prevent tears from propagating therefrom.

Claim 19 (currently amended): The connector assembly of claim ~~[[16]]~~18, wherein said raised protuberances are formed along outer perimeters of said clamping rings on said male and female connector members.

Claim 20 (original): The connector assembly of claim 14, wherein each said opening for attachment of a load comprises:

a bore formed through said flange portion.

Claim 21 (original): The connector assembly of claim 14, wherein each said opening for attachment of a load comprises:

a hook portion mounted on said flange portion.

Claim 22 (original): The connector assembly of claim 14, wherein said male and female connector members are each formed unitarily of injection-molded plastic.

Claim 23 (new): A connector assembly for use with a tarp, said connector assembly comprising:

male and female connector members, each said connector member comprising:

a base portion having a broad, generally flat bearing face for engaging material of a tarp; and

a flange portion that extends from said base portion opposite and generally normal to said bearing face for being gripped between and rotated by the fingers of a hand, said flange portion having an opening for attachment of a load thereto; said male connector member further comprising:

a threaded screw portion extending normal to said bearing face thereof, said screw portion having a tapered, sharply pointed tip for piercing material of a tarp; and

said female connector member further comprising:

a threaded socket portion extending normal to said bearing face thereof for receiving said screw portion of said male connector member in threaded engagement therewith.

Claim 24 (new): The connector assembly of claim 23, wherein said opening for attachment of a load comprises:

a bore formed through said flange portion around an axis that extends generally perpendicular to an axis of said screw and socket portions.

Claim 25 (new): The connector assembly of claim 23, wherein said opening for attachment of a load comprises:

a hoop portion formed on said flange portion and having a hook opening formed around an axis that extends generally perpendicular to an axis of said screw and socket portions.